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# the SANDMAN™

## CONVERGENCE

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LONG, LONG AGO, BEFORE THE FAMILY LEFT THE OLD COUNTRY-- AND WHAT A PALAVER *THAT* WAS, MY CHILD-- THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN OF OUR PEOPLE.

GRANDPA. I DON'T *WANT* TO HEAR A STORY. I WANT TO WATCH TV.

TV... IT'S ALWAYS TV. I DON'T WANT TO *HEAR* ABOUT TV. YOU TALK ABOUT TV ONE MORE TIME I WON'T BE RESPONSIBLE FOR MY ACTIONS--

FER CHRISSAKES GRANDPA.

ENOUGH!

YOUR PARENTS, WHAT KIND OF THINGS ARE THEY *TEACHING* YOU? IN THE OLD COUNTRY YOU'D NEVER HEAR *ANY* OF THE FAMILY TAKING *THAT* NAME IN VAIN.

GRANDPA. IT'S JUST SOMETHING THEY SAY OVER HERE. *EVERYBODY* SAYS IT.

*OHO?* AND I SUPPOSE IF EVERBODY CUT OFF THEIR HEADS AND STUFFED ASAFOETIDA INTO THEIR MOUTHS AND BURIED THEIR HEARTS AT CROSS-ROADS, THEN *YOU'D* DO IT TOO?

GRANDPA...

FINE. FINE, FINE. IT'S *MY* FAULT. I'M OLD, I REMEMBER THE OLD WAYS, SO WHAT DO *I* KNOW? I DON'T WATCH THIS *MTV*, I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING. SO WHO LISTENS TO CRAZY STORIES...

GRANDPA. GRANDPA, I'M *SORRY*.

LOOK, I'LL LISTEN TO THE STORY.

OHH. SO *NOW* YOU'RE DOING ME A *FAVOR*. IS THAT IT?

GRANDPA, I *WANT* TO HEAR THE STORY. I REALLY DO. GRANDFATHER? PLEASE?

HMM.

GRANDFATHER?

I'VE FORGOTTEN IT.

YOU *WHAT*?

I'VE FORGOTTEN IT.

YOU HAVEN'T FORGOTTEN IT. COME ON, GRAND-FATHER. IT BEGAN "LONG, LONG AGO, BEFORE THE FAMILY LEFT THE OLD COUNTRY..."

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YES. THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN OF OUR PEOPLE.

HE WAS POOR, BUT HE WAS HONEST AND HE LIVED IN THE FOREST, WITH HIS FATHER.

THE FORESTS TODAY ARE POOR THINGS. THESE WERE THE *REAL* FORESTS OF THE OLD COUNTRY: MANY ENTERED THEM WHO NEVER CAME OUT AGAIN.

TREES THERE WERE, OLD AS TREES CAN BE, HUGE AND GRASPING WITH HEARTS BLACK AS SIN. STRANGE TREES THAT SOME SAID WALKED IN THE NIGHT--

OKAY. IT WAS A FOREST. IT HAD TREES IN IT. I'M NOT *STUPID*. I *GOT* IT.

SO *YOU* WANT TO TELL THE STORY? MAYBE *I* SHOULD LISTEN, YOU TELL IT SO WELL...

I DIDN'T SAY THAT. IT'S YOUR STORY. *YOU* TELL IT.

IN THE SUMMER THE FOREST WAS WARM AND THE TRUE BEARS ROAMED. IN THE WINTER IT WAS COLD, COLD ENOUGH TO FREEZE THE SKIN OFF YOUR FACE AND FREEZE YOUR PISS BEFORE IT TOUCHED THE GROUND.

IN THE WINTER THE TRUE WOLVES WOULD COME DOWN FROM THE STEPPES, DRIVEN SOUTH BY HUNGER; AND THERE WAS SOMETIMES PRECIOUS LITTLE FOOD FOR THEM--AND LESS FOR US.

THERE WERE FEW TRUE FOLK IN THE FOREST. HERE AND THERE PERHAPS A WOODCUTTER OR A CHARCOAL BURNER AND HIS BRATS; HUNTERS WERE FEW, BUT DANGEROUS.

THERE WERE CLEARINGS, AND IN SOME OF THE CLEARINGS SMALL SETTLEMENTS HAD SPRUNG UP: NERVOUS MEN AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN HUDDLED AROUND FLICKERING BONFIRES, HOPING SOMEHOW TO KEEP THE DARKNESS AT BAY...

THE YOUNG MAN'S MOTHER HAD DIED BRINGING HIM INTO THE WORLD; SHE GAVE HIM LIFE, A SMALL WOODEN FINGER-RING, AND THE NAME VASSILY. THERE HAVE BEEN WORSE LEGACIES.

VASSILY? BUT THAT'S...

IT'S A PRETTY COMMON NAME. ANYWAY...

VASSILY AND HIS FATHER LIVED FAR, FAR FROM ANY OTHERS DEEP IN THE FOREST, AND SAW NO ONE, OR ALMOST NO ONE, FOR TRAVELLERS IN THOSE PARTS WERE FEW, AND FOOLHARDY.

THE LAD WAS SIXTEEN WHEN A PEDDLER WOMAN CAME TO THEIR PART OF THE FOREST.

WAS SHE ONE OF US?

NO, GIRL. SHE WAS GYPSY. ROMANY STOCK. A WISE WOMAN.

SHE HAD TWO GOOD TEETH IN HER HEAD, TWO EYES BRIGHT AS A BIRD'S, AND SHE SAW THE YOUNG MAN SITTING IN THE UNDERGROWTH, STILL AS A STUMP.

YOU CAN COME OUT OF THERE, BOY. DON'T THINK I DON'T SEE YOU, BECAUSE I DO.

AND WHAT DO THEY CALL *YOU*, THEN, WHEN YOU'RE AT HOME?

VASSILY.

LISTEN: I'M HUNGRY, BOY.

RABBIT. THAT'S GOOD EATING. THANK YOU, VASSILY.

DO MANY OF YOUR PEOPLE LIVE AROUND HERE?

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE SCARED OF **ME**, LAD. I'M NOT LOOKING FOR TROUBLE.

I'M LOOKING FOR CUSTOMERS.

HERE. LET ME SHOW YOU WHAT I'VE GOT. ALL MANNER OF WONDERFUL THINGS...

THIS IS THE EMERALD HEART OF KOSCHEI THE DEATHLESS. HE KEPT HIS LIFE IN THIS HEART, BUT A WOMAN STOLE IT, AND HE DIED.

THIS IS A CLOAK OF NIGHT. THERE IS A COUNTRY FAR IN THE NORTH WHERE DAY NEVER BREAKS. THIS CLOAK WAS WOVEN FROM THE SILK OF BLACK WORMS WHO FEED ON THE LEAVES OF DARK TREES IN LIGHTLESS CAVERNS BENEATH THAT LAND.

THIS IS THE DRUM INESCAPABLE, THAT EMPUSA CRAFTED FROM THE HIDE OF A WYVERN AND THE WOOD OF YGGDRASIL: IF YOU BEAT THIS DRUM NOTHING CAN ESCAPE YOU...

BUT GRANDPA. HOW DID AN OLD GYPSY WOMAN GET HOLD OF ALL THOSE WONDERFUL TREASURES?

ARE YOU *CRAZY?* AN OLD GYPSY WOMAN'S GOING TO BE WALKING AROUND A FOREST WITH THE EMERALD HEART OF KOSCHEI THE DEATHLESS IN HER PACK? OR THE DRUM INESCAPABLE?

BUT YOU SAID--

SHE WAS ROMANY, HE WAS GAJÉ -- AN OUTSIDER. IT'S NO CRIME FOR THEM TO CHEAT THE GAJÉ.

HE'D NEVER SEEN SO MANY BEAUTIFUL THINGS IN HIS LIFE.

WHAT... WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR THESE?

GIVE IT BACK, SON.

HE HAS NOTHING TO PAY FOR YOUR BAUBLES, OLD WOMAN. WE ARE POOR FOREST FOLK, AND HAVE NOTHING TO SPARE.

YOU WERE MEANT TO BE HUNTING.

I...I *WAS*, FATHER.

HE'S A GOOD BOY. DON'T BE HARD ON HIM.

MY SON. YOU MUST NOT TALK TO FOLK IN THE FOREST. THEY MEAN US HARM.

SHE WAS JUST AN OLD WOMAN. SHE SEEMED WELL-INTENTIONED.

SHE IS NOT OF THE PEOPLE.

HIS FATHER SAID MANY THINGS TO HIM THAT NIGHT ABOUT THE PEOPLE, AND THE FOLK OUTSIDE THE FOREST, BUT VASSILY DIDN'T LISTEN.

HE WAS THINKING ABOUT THE OLD PEASANT WOMAN AND HER PACK.

MY FATHER SAYS THAT THE THINGS YOU SHOWED ME ARE VALUELESS. GEWGAWS AND TRINKETS.

YOU STARTLED ME. I DIDN'T HEAR YOU COMING. NOT THAT MY EARS ARE WHAT THEY WERE.

VALUE'S IN WHAT PEOPLE *THINK*. NOT IN WHAT'S REAL. VALUE'S IN *DREAMS*, BOY.

BUT YOU WERE GOOD TO ME, YESTERDAY. ROAST RABBIT LAST NIGHT, COLD RABBIT TODAY AND TOMORROW.

THAT'S GOOD DEEDS.

HERE.

WHAT IS IT?

IT'S A PICTURE OF THE DUKE'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER. HERE. TAKE IT. IT'S YOURS.

YOU LOOK AT HER. ONCE I WAS MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN HER.

I HAD LONG BLACK HAIR, AND I COULD WALK, AND I COULD SMILE, AND I DANCED IN EVERY TOWN FROM PSKOFF TO VYATKA.

AND EVERY YOUNG MAN WHO SAW ME LOOKED AT ME WITH FIRE IN HIS EYES. I MADE MISTAKES, I'M NOT SAYING I DIDN'T...

DA-DE-DA-DE-DUM.

MY FATHER WANTED ME TO MARRY OFF TO A FINE MAN... BUT I RAN AWAY FROM HIM, AND GOT MY HEART BROKEN. *DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME?*

NO.

I ALWAYS FOLLOWED MY HEART...

OHH...HH. YOU'VE A GOOD HEART. I'M ROMANY. I CAN TELL. I'M SORRY, MY DARLING: I WAS A THOUSAND LEAGUES AWAY.

HERE. GIVE ME YOUR LITTLE FINGER, LOOK INTO MY EYES, AND I'LL TELL YOUR FORTUNE.

WHAT... WHAT *ARE* YOU?

KEEP AWAY FROM ME.

AND THE OLD WOMAN SCUTTLED OFF INTO THE FOREST LIKE A FRIGHTENED RABBIT.

THE BOY RETURNED TO THE HUT. HIS FATHER RETURNED THAT NIGHT, WITH A STAG, AND TOGETHER THEY FLAYED AND BUTCHERED IT, TOGETHER THEY HUNG THE MEAT TO DRY.

FOR WINTER WAS COMING AND WINTER, AS I TOLD YOU, WAS CRUEL.

AT NIGHT HE'D TAKE OUT THE PICTURE OF THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER, AND STARE AT IT.

WHAT DID SHE LOOK LIKE?

HM?

THE WOMAN IN THE MINIATURE.

SHE HAD EYES AS BLUE AS CORNFLOWERS, LIPS AS RED AS POPPIES, SKIN WHITER THAN MILK, HAIR AS GOLD AS THE SETTING SUN...

OKAY. YEAH, *OKAY*. I GET THE IDEA.

*YOU* ASKED, MISS OKAY-I-GET-THE-IDEA.

SORRY.

THE YOUNG MAN STALKED THE FOREST IN THE COMING DAYS BUT HIS HEART WAS NOT IN THE HUNT; THE BEASTS HE KILLED--AND BEASTS WERE GETTING HARDER TO FIND AS THE DAYS DREW IN-- WERE KILLED WITHOUT PRIDE.

HE GATHERED WOOD WITHOUT JOY. HE RAN WITHOUT DELIGHTING IN HIS SPEED OR HIS SILENCE.

ONE DAY HE TOOK A HANDKERCHIEF, AND WRAPPED UP HIS FEW POSSESSIONS --SOME TARNISHED BRONZE COINS, A SMALL BONE THAT HE HAD CARVED INTO THE SHAPE OF A SMALL BONE, A THIN WOODEN FINGER-RING HIS MOTHER HAD LEFT HIM...

A SMALL BONE THAT HE HAD *WHAT?*

CARVED INTO THE SHAPE OF A SMALL BONE.

BUT IT WAS A SMALL BONE *ALREADY.*

HE CARVED IT INTO THE SHAPE OF A *DIFFERENT* SMALL BONE. ALL RIGHT?

LOOK, CELESTE, THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED. OKAY? DO *I* ASK *YOU* TO EXPLAIN MICHAEL JACKSON LYRICS?

I DON'T *LIKE* MICHAEL JACKSON ANY MORE. ONLY *DWEEBS* AND *KIDS* LISTEN TO MICHAEL JACKSON.

*LAST* WEEK, YOU LIKED MICHAEL JACKSON. *THIS* WEEK YOU *DON'T* LIKE MICHAEL JACKSON. SO WHAT AM *I*? A MIND READER?

HIS FATHER WAS AWAY, HUNTING. VASSILY THOUGHT IT BEST TO LEAVE BEFORE HE RETURNED HOME.

HUH! AND *MY* PARENTS COMPLAIN WHEN I GET BACK LATE FROM A *PARTY!*

THIS WAS THE OLD DAYS IN THE OLD COUNTRY. WE DID THINGS *DIFFERENTLY* THEN.

THE LAD SET OFF INTO THE FOREST.

AND SOME LEAGUES OFF, HE ENCOUNTERED THE PEDDLER WOMAN, FOR THE LAST TIME.

HER BODY WAS ALREADY COLD, AND THE BLOOD ON HER THROAT HAD HARDENED TO A BLACK CRUST.

DAYS LATER HE REACHED THE FOREST BORDERS.

WE DON'T SEE MANY PEDDLERS IN THESE PARTS. WHICH WAY DID YOU COME?

THROUGH THE OLD FOREST.

THE *DEVIL* YOU HAVE! DON'T YOU KNOW THAT FOREST IS HOME TO GHOULS AND OGRES? YOU WERE LUCKY TO ESCAPE WITH YOUR LIFE.

I SAW NOTHING THAT COULD HAVE HURT ME.

THE *DEVIL* YOU SAY.

WELL, WHAT ARE YOU SELLING, PEDDLER BOY?

AN EMERALD. A LITTLE DRUM. A SHIRT... A BOOK. OTHER THINGS.

WHICH WAY ARE YOU GOING FROM HERE?

WHICH WAY IS THE PALACE OF THE DUKE?

TWO FULL WEEKS' TRAVEL WEST. YOU MUST HAVE *DEVILISH* RICH PICKINGS IN THAT PACK OF YOURS IF YOU WOULD SEEK TO PEDDLE TO THE DUKE.

VASSILY ATE LIGHTLY OF THE INN'S INDIFFERENT FOOD, THEN WENT UP TO HIS ROOM. HE BOLTED THE DOOR.

THE LEGS OF THE BED WERE BOLTED TO THE FLOOR, AND IT COULD NOT BE MOVED. HE WENT TO SLEEP ON THE HARD FLOOR, IN THE OPPOSITE CORNER OF THE ROOM.

THE INN HAD BEEN QUIET FOR SOME HOURS WHEN A PANEL IN THE WALL ABOVE HIS BED SWUNG OPEN.

THERE WAS A MOMENT OF SILENCE, AND THEN, THROUGH THE HIDDEN DOORWAY IN THE WALL, VASSILY SAW THE INNKEEPER.

VASSILY HAD LEARNED A VALUABLE LESSON THAT NIGHT.

BEFORE HE LEFT THE INN HE TOOK BACK THE COIN HE HAD GIVEN THE INNKEEPER FOR HIS FOOD AND LODGING, FEELING QUITE JUSTIFIED IN SO DOING.

HE SET OFF DUE WEST, AWAY FROM THE SUNRISE, WELL-RESTED AND WELL-FED.

TWO DAYS OF TRAVEL, AND AN EARLY SNOW WAS BEGINNING TO FALL, WHEN UP TO HIM ON THE ROAD COMES THE TALLEST, THINNEST MAN THAT VASSILY HAD EVER SEEN.

"WHERE ARE YOU BOUND, YOUNG PEDDLER?" ASKS THE MAN.

"I'M BOUND WHERE MY FEET TAKE ME, AND WHERE MY HEART WILLS," SAID THE YOUNG MAN.

AND WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR PACK, YOUNG PEDDLER?

ODDMENTS AND TRINKETS, SIR. NOTHING OF ANY VALUE.

VALUE'S IN THE MIND OF THE BUYER, NOT THE PEDDLER.

AND IS THERE ANYTHING YOU'D BE SEEKING?

INDEED THERE IS. I'M LOOKING FOR A BOOK. I THOUGHT PERHAPS YOU COULD SELL IT TO ME.

AND WHAT WOULD I BE DOING WITH A BOOK?

YOU AREN'T THE *FIRST* TO CARRY THAT PACK, YOUNG MAN, ARE YOU?

SO, HAVE YOU MY BOOK?

I HAVE MANY THINGS, INCLUDING WHAT I HAVE BEEN ASSURED IS IN ALL PROBABILITY THE EMERALD HEART OF KOSCHEI THE DEATHLESS.

ACCORDING TO POPULAR REPORT, KOSCHEI THE DEATHLESS KEPT HIS HEART IN A DUCK EGG; AND IT WAS DESTROYED BY A YOUNG GALLANT, TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

NO, IT'S THE BOOK I'M INTERESTED IN. WHAT'S YOUR *PRICE*?

HER.

OH, DEAR ME. GOOD GRACIOUS, NO. I CAN'T PAY ANYTHING LIKE THAT. I'M JUST A LIBRARIAN. A LIBRARIAN WHO LOST A BOOK.

VERY WELL.

AND WHEN HE LOOKED BACK THE THIN MAN WAS GONE.

SO, THIS THIN MAN. WAS HE ONE OF THE PEOPLE? WAS HE A FAIRY OR SOMETHING? I DON'T BELIEVE IN FAIRIES.

OF COURSE YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN FAIRIES. YOU'RE FIFTEEN. YOU THINK I BELIEVED IN FAIRIES AT FIFTEEN?

TOOK ME UNTIL I WAS AT LEAST A HUNDRED AND FORTY. HUNDRED AND FIFTY, MAYBE. ANYWAY, HE WASN'T A FAIRY. HE WAS A LIBRARIAN. ALL RIGHT?

MM. IT ALL SOUNDS SUSPICIOUSLY POST-MODERN TO ME, GRANDPA. ARE YOU SURE THIS IS REALLY A STORY FROM THE OLD COUNTRY?

LISTEN, BLOOD OF MY BLOOD. ALTHOUGH I'M A HARD MAN TO ANGER, AND I LOVE YOU DEEPLY, IF YOU INTERRUPT ME AGAIN SO HELP ME I'LL RIP OUT YOUR THROAT WITH MY TEETH.

SORRY, GRANDFATHER.

VASSILY WAS ALONE ON THE ROAD, ALTHOUGH A RAVEN FLEW FAR, FAR ABOVE HIM AS HE TRAVELLED.

THE SUN FELL AND ROSE AND FELL AGAIN: HE SAW NO ONE ON THE ROAD. THE SNOW HAD TURNED INTO SLEET, AND THICK MUD SLOWED HIS PROGRESS.

ON THE EVENING OF THE THIRD DAY HE REACHED THE BORDERS OF ANOTHER FOREST; AND IT WAS THERE THAT HE AGAIN ENCOUNTERED THE TALL MAN.

YOU'VE GOT MY BOOK.

I'VE GOT A BOOK.

THE TALL MAN TOOK THE SACK OFF HIS BACK AND TIPPED IT OUT ONTO THE GROUND. GOLD GLITTERED IN PILES IN THE WET MUD.

THIS IS YOURS IF YOU GIVE ME THE BOOK.

VASSILY JUST STARED AT HIM.

I DON'T WANT GOLD.

NO?

YOU KNOW MY PRICE.

I'M NOT GETTING YOU THE WOMAN, AND THAT'S FINAL. DO YOU KNOW THE BOTHER I HAD GETTING THE GOLD WITHOUT ANYONE NOTICING?

I'M A PEDDLER. I HAVE A BOOK FOR SALE--IF YOU CAN MEET MY PRICE. IF NOT...

YES?

I CAN BURN IT.

IT WON'T BURN.

THEN I WON'T BURN IT. BUT IT WON'T BE YOURS UNLESS YOU MEET MY PRICE.

OH DEAR.

CAN I GET BACK TO YOU ON THIS ONE?

THAT NIGHT THE CLOUDS CLEARED, THE MOON WAS FULL AND VASSILY MADE GOOD TIME.

AFTER A WHILE HE LEFT THE PATH AND RAN THROUGH THE FOREST, LOPING GENTLY IN THE MOONLIGHT. HE SCENTED A HIGH SCENT IN THE AIR: THE SMELL OF DEER.

WEIGHED DOWN BY HIS PACK AS HE WAS, HE GAVE CHASE TO THE DEER.

HE FOLLOWED HER FOR LEAGUES, ACROSS SCRUB AND HEATH AND WOOD, EXULTING IN THE HUNT. HE FOUND HIMSELF WISHING THAT THE CHASE COULD GO ON FOREVER: HIMSELF AND THE DEER, BOUND TOGETHER, HUNTER AND HUNTED UNTIL THE END OF TIME.

BUT ALL THINGS MUST END. AND HE TENSED FOR THE FINAL LEAP...

CRACK

A GOOD EVENING TO YOU, KINSMAN.

IF YOU HAD BEEN FASTER *YOU* WOULD HAVE CAUGHT HER, NOT I.

I AM CARRYING A PACK ON MY BACK. WERE IT NOT FOR THE PACK I WOULD BE FASTER. I HAVE CHASED HER FOR MANY, MANY LEAGUES.

YOUR PEOPLE ARE NEAR HERE?

CAN I ACCOMPANY YOU?

IF YOU WISH.

THERE WAS AN ENCAMPMENT OF THE PEOPLE THERE, IN THE HEART OF THE WOOD.

*HE* TRIED TO CATCH THIS DEER. *HE* FAILED. *I* SUCCEEDED.

THEY ASKED HIM NO QUESTIONS. HE GAVE THEM NO ANSWERS. HE HAD NEVER SEEN SO MANY OF THE PEOPLE BEFORE; BUT THEY WERE HIS KIN, AND HE WAS NOT AFRAID.

A GOOD EVENING TO YOU, GREAT LADY.

BEHIND THE CAMP WAS A SMALL HUT ON CHICKEN LEGS, SCRATCHING IDLY IN THE DIRT.

WELL SPOKEN, LITTLE COUSIN. AND WHAT HAVE YOU IN YOUR LITTLE BAG FOR YOUR OLD AUNTIE, THEN?

I HAVE SOMETHING YOU'VE *ALWAYS* WANTED, GOOD GOSSIP. THE EMERALD HEART OF KOSCHEI THE DEATH-LESS.

BABA YAGA GRINNED THEN, AND HER TEETH GLINTED IRON IN THE MOONLIGHT.

AYE, *THAT* WOULD BE A TREASURE INDEED. AND WHAT WOULD *YOU* WANT FROM YOUR OLD AUNTIE FOR THAT?

I NEED TO GET TO THE DUKE'S PALACE.

HMM.

TELL ME, BOY: HAVE YOU EVER RIDDEN THE NIGHT SKY, IN A MORTAR?

IN THE BLACK SHADOW OF BABA YAGA BABIES SCREAMED AND MOTHERS MISCARRIED; MILK SOURED AND MEN WENT MAD.

BELOW THEM JEWS WERE BURNED IN THEIR HOUSES AND GYPSIES WERE BEATEN TO DEATH. NIGHTBIRDS SCREAMED AND OWLS HOOTED AND WOLVES HOWLED.

FASTER THAN THE WIND THEY RODE THAT NIGHT. AND BEFORE DAWN THEY LANDED IN THE COURT-YARD OF THE WINTER PALACE OF THE DUKE.

WELL? MY PAYMENT?

WITH GOODWILL, GREAT LADY.

AYE. THIS IS THE EMERALD HEART OF KOSCHEI THE DEATHLESS.

WELL, GOOD LUCK TO YOU, BOY.

SHE BEAT HER PESTLE THREE TIMES AGAINST THE SIDE OF HER MORTAR. CHURCHES FELL DOWN, ROADS CRACKED, TOWERS CRUMBLED, AND BABA YAGA ROSE HIGH INTO THE AIR, SCREECHING LOUD ENOUGH TO WAKE THE DEAD.

HOLD ON, I THOUGHT YOU SAID IT WASN'T THE EMERALD HEART OF KOSCHEI THE DEATHLESS. YOU SAID THE OLD PEDDLER WOMAN HAD LIED.

MAYBE I WAS MISTAKEN. MAYBE BABA YAGA WAS EASILY FOOLED. WHO KNOWS?

YOU SHOULDN'T TRUST THE STORY-TELLER; ONLY TRUST THE STORY.

HMPH.

ANYWAY: THE YOUNG MAN WENT UP TO THE GREAT DOOR AND BANGED HEAVILY ON IT WITH HIS FIST.

IT WAS OPENED BY A SMALL FAT MAN, WHO STANK OF POWDER.

YES?

I SEEK THIS WOMAN.

OH. YOU DO, DO YOU? SO IT'S TRUE WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT THE FULL MOON, THEN.

I HAVE COME MANY LEAGUES TO SEE HER.

OH, GREAT AND NOBLE LORD, I WOULD NOT DREAM OF DENYING YOU ANYTHING.

BUT THE NOBLE LADY MUST BE WOKEN, AND SHE MUST BE DRESSED AND BATHED AND POWDERED BEFORE SHE SEES SOMEONE AS IMPORTANT AS YOURSELF, PEDDLER BOY.

FOLLOW ME.

DOWN THIS WAY, SIR. THESE STEPS LEAD TO THE WAITING ROOM.

THE LITTLE MAN WAS TERRIFIED, BUT VASSILY COULD NOT SMELL IT, FOR SCENT AND POWDER SURROUNDED HIM LIKE MIST, AND VASSILY WAS UNUSED TO THE FOLK OF THE CITIES.

AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CELLAR STEPS WAS AN IRON DOOR.

HERE. WAIT IN HERE, MY LORD.

THE NOBLE LADY WILL SEE YOU SHORTLY.

AND THE YOUNG MAN WENT IN.

OR WHEN HELL FREEZES OVER.

VASSILY SPENT THE NEXT FEW HOURS HUNTING FOR A WAY TO ESCAPE.

HE TRIED TO FORCE THE DOOR, BUT IT WAS COLD IRON. THERE WAS NO WINDOW, AND THE CELL WAS LINED WITH MORTARED STONE.

HE WAS HUNGRY, NOW. HE OPENED HIS PACK, AND TOOK FOOD FROM IT, EATING IT BUT SPARINGLY.

HE WAS OF THE PEOPLE, AND HE COULD SEE IN FULL DARKNESS BECAUSE HE HADN'T RUINED HIS EYES WITH TELEVISION--

GRANDPA. MY EYES ARE FINE.

OKAY. OKAY. SO YOU CAN BLAME AN OLD MAN FOR BEING CONCERNED? SO YOUR EYES ARE GOOD TOO. THAT'S GOOD. HIS EYES WERE BETTER.

HE DRANK THE WATER IN HIS PACK, MEASURING IT OUT A MOUTHFUL AT A TIME.

EVENTUALLY THERE WAS NO FOOD LEFT.

WE OF THE PEOPLE ARE HARD TO KILL, AND HARDER TO KILL THE OLDER WE GET; BUT HE WAS YOUNG, AND WITHOUT FOOD OR WATER OR MOONLIGHT HE WOULD DIE THE TRUE DEATH.

A SLOW DEATH, AND FAR FROM NOBLE.

VASSILY RESIGNED HIMSELF TO HIS PASSING. HE SAT IN HIS CELL, UNDER EARTH, UNDER STONE, GUARDED BY COLD, COLD IRON; AND HE WAITED, HUNGRY, THIRSTY, AND WEAK, FOR THE END...

AT FIRST HE THOUGHT HE WAS IMAGINING THE LIGHT.

HELLO, YOUNG MAN. I'VE COME FOR MY BOOK.

IF YOU HAD WAITED ANOTHER WEEK THEN YOU WOULD NOT *HAVE* TO ASK.

YOU COULD SIMPLY HAVE TAKEN IT FROM MY CORPSE.

IT'S *NOT* THAT SIMPLE. AT THIS POINT THE BOOK IS YOUR PROPERTY. WHEN YOU DIE, TECHNICALLY IT BECOMES THE PROPERTY OF THE DUKE.

AND I *REALLY* HAVE NO DESIRE TO OPEN NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE DUKE...

IT WOULD ALMOST *CERTAINLY* ATTRACT ATTENTION, WHICH IS SOMETHING I'M DOING MY BEST TO AVOID.

GOODNESS *KNOWS* WHAT MY LORD WOULD SAY IF HE LEARNED I'D LET A BOOK BE STOLEN FROM HIS LIBRARY.

DO YOU KNOW HOW *LONG* IT'S BEEN SINCE I MISLAID A BOOK?

WELL, *LET'S* JUST SAY THE CONTINENTS WEREN'T IN THEIR CURRENT SHAPES, NOT THAT *THAT* MEANS ANYTHING TO YOU.

NO.

SO, SUPPOSE WE DO A DEAL. YOUR FREEDOM FOR THE BOOK. *YES?*

NO.

I AM OF THE PEOPLE, MAN. WHAT I SEEK, I FIND. WHAT I HUNT, I TAKE. I CAN HIDE IN A SHADOW. MY TEETH ARE SHARP ENOUGH TO CUT BONE. I RUN ON FOUR LEGS AS EASILY AS TWO.

I AM KIN TO DWARROW AND NIGHTGAUNT. I OWE ALLEGIANCE TO NONE BORN AND I FEAR NOTHING. I WANT THE WOMAN.

OH DEAR.

WELL. YOU'D BETTER COME WITH ME, THEN.

HE FOLLOWED THE THIN MAN THROUGH A DOOR THAT HADN'T BEEN THERE A MOMENT BEFORE, AND FOUND HIMSELF IN A LIBRARY. IT SEEMED TO GO ON FOREVER--A BEAUTIFUL CORRIDOR LINED WITH BOOKS.

NOW, QUIET THROUGH HERE. VERY, ***VERY*** QUIET. I CAN TAKE SHORTCUTS... BUT ***ONLY*** THROUGH THE LIBRARY. WE MUSTN'T DO ***ANYTHING*** TO ATTRACT ***HIS*** ATTENTION.

BE VERY, VERY...

QUIET.

Lucien? You did not tell me we had a guest.

Stop that.

Well, Lucien? I'm waiting.

GRRRRR.

AH. WELL, LORD. I MUST ADMIT I ***WAS*** HOPING THAT YOU WOULDN'T FIND OUT ABOUT THIS.

Your newfound habit of bringing home strays?

UM, NO, NOT EXACTLY...

THERE IS A BOOK MISSING FROM THE LIBRARY, LORD. IT IS IN THE POSSESSION OF THIS YOUNG MAN.

BUT EVERYTHING'S ALL RIGHT. I'VE SORTED IT ALL OUT, AND HE'S GOING TO GIVE IT BACK TO US. FOR AN, UM, PRICE.

I see. And what is his price?

SO THE YOUNG MAN SHOWED HIM THE MINIATURE. AND THE LORD OF DREAMS LISTENED TO HIS TALE.

AND THEN HE SMILED.

I see.

Give Lucien the book.

The Merrie Comedie of The Redemption of Doctor Fuustus Christopher Marlowe

Very good. Now, let us visit your lady friend.

ONE STEP FORWARD AND THEY WERE IN THE BEDROOM OF THE DUKE'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER WHOSE NAME WAS... I DON'T REMEMBER. NATASHA, SOMETHING LIKE THAT.

SHE WAS ASLEEP IN HER BED.

She dreams of walking through a covered market, looking for cornflowers and finding only goblets of sour blood.

Well? Do you dare wake her up?

VASSILY TOUCHED THE WOMAN'S SHOULDER AND SHE OPENED HER EYES.

HELLO.

MMM... WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN MY CHAMBER?

WHO ARE YOU? WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE?

VASSILY LOOKED AT HER. SHE WAS BEAUTIFUL, INDEED. AND PALE. AND FRAGILE.

SHE WAS EVERYTHING HE HAD DREAMED OF.

THIS IS YOURS.

I'M HUNGRY. TAKE ME AWAY FROM HERE.

PLEASE.

THE LORD OF DREAMS TOOK THE YOUNG MAN BACK TO HIS PALACE, AND VASSILY FEASTED THERE ON VENISON AND HARE AND PHEASANT AND KID; HE DRANK TOKAY AND SHERBET AND FINE BRANDY.

WHEN LUCIEN ASKED VASSILY ABOUT THE DUKE'S DAUGHTER HE SHOOK HIS HEAD AND SAID NOTHING.

BUT THE LORD OF DREAMS KNEW THAT WISHES ARE SOMETIMES BEST LEFT UNGRANTED; AND HE DID NOT NEED TO ASK.

VAGGILY AWOKE IN THE FOREST.

AND ONE NIGHT IN EARLY SPRING, WHEN THE CRESCENT MOON HUNG SHARP AND WHITE IN THE SKY, HE RAN THROUGH THE WOODS IN THE SHAPE OF A WOLF.

HE RECOGNIZED HER SCENT FROM FAR ACROSS THE WOOD.

THE HUNT LASTED FOR HOURS: UNTIL, AT THE END, HIS TEETH CLOSED, GENTLY, ON HER NECK, NOT BREAKING THE SKIN, AND SHE LAY STILL.

AND THEN, FLICKERING AND SHIFTING FROM WOLF-SHAPE TO MAN-SHAPE, THEY CELEBRATED THEIR UNION.

AND THE PEOPLE CAME FROM HUNDREDS OF LEAGUES AROUND FOR THE WEDDING. AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY TOGETHER UNTIL DEATH PARTED THEM.

AND THAT'S IT, HUH?

YES, THAT'S THE STORY.

IT'S KIND OF SEXIST.

IT'S NOT SEXIST AT *ALL*. IT'S THE CUSTOM OF THE PEOPLE. OR IT *WAS*. BEFORE WE CAME HERE.

*HMPH*. SO HOW DID THE DREAM-KING'S BOOK GET INTO THE OLD PEDDLER WOMAN'S SACK IN THE FIRST PLACE?

THE DREAM KING TELLS *ME* HIS SECRETS? IT JUST WAS, THAT'S ALL.

THERE *ISN'T* ANY DREAM KING. JUST ANOTHER MADE-UP PERSON IN ANOTHER DUMB STORY.

I KNOW WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT. MY PARENTS PUT YOU *UP* TO THIS DIDN'T THEY? IT'S ABOUT *CHRISTOPHER*, ISN'T IT? IT'S ABOUT MY *BOYFRIEND*.

WHY WOULD IT BE ABOUT YOUR BOYFRIEND?

BECAUSE HE'S *NOT* ONE OF THE PEOPLE. HE'S ONE OF *THEM*.

*JESUS!* YOU'RE SO TRANS*PARENT*, GRANDPA.

LOOK, WE DON'T *LIVE* IN THE FOREST ANY MORE. THIS IS NEW JERSEY, NOT NOVAYA ZEMLYA. AND I CAN GO OUT WITH *WHOEVER* I *WANT* TO.

IT WAS A TRUE STORY.

*TRUE?* GIVE ME A *BREAK*.

IT'S A STORY OF THE PEOPLE. DON'T YOU WANT TO KNOW WHERE YOU *COME* FROM? WHO YOU *ARE*?

NOT REALLY.

IT'S *SEXIST*, IT'S *INSULAR*, AND THE MORAL IS THAT THE PEOPLE ARE HAPPY WITH THE PEOPLE. *BIG* SURPRISE.

I *KNEW* I SHOULD HAVE WATCHED TV. AT LEAST *THAT* DOESN'T TRY TO PRETEND THAT WE'RE STILL LIVING FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

BUT IT WASN'T *ABOUT* YOUR BOY-FRIEND. IT WASN'T *REALLY* EVEN ABOUT THE *PEOPLE*.

IT WAS ABOUT WHAT HE *SAW* WHEN HE LOOKED AT THE SLEEPING WOMAN...

WHY HE TURNED HIS BACK ON HER.

IT WAS ABOUT *DREAMS*...

*MY* FAULT. I THOUGHT YOU'D WANT TO HEAR THE STORY. *YOU* WATCH YOUR TELEVISION. YOUR PARENTS WILL BE HOME SOON.

G'NIGHT, GRANDPA.

I *WISH* YOU COULD HAVE KNOWN YOUR GRANDMOTHER. SHE WAS AN AMAZING WOMAN. SHE KNEW THE VALUE OF THINGS.

BUT SHE NEVER LET ME FORGET THAT SHE HAD BEATEN ME TO THE DEER.

*GRANDFATHER?*

GOODNIGHT.

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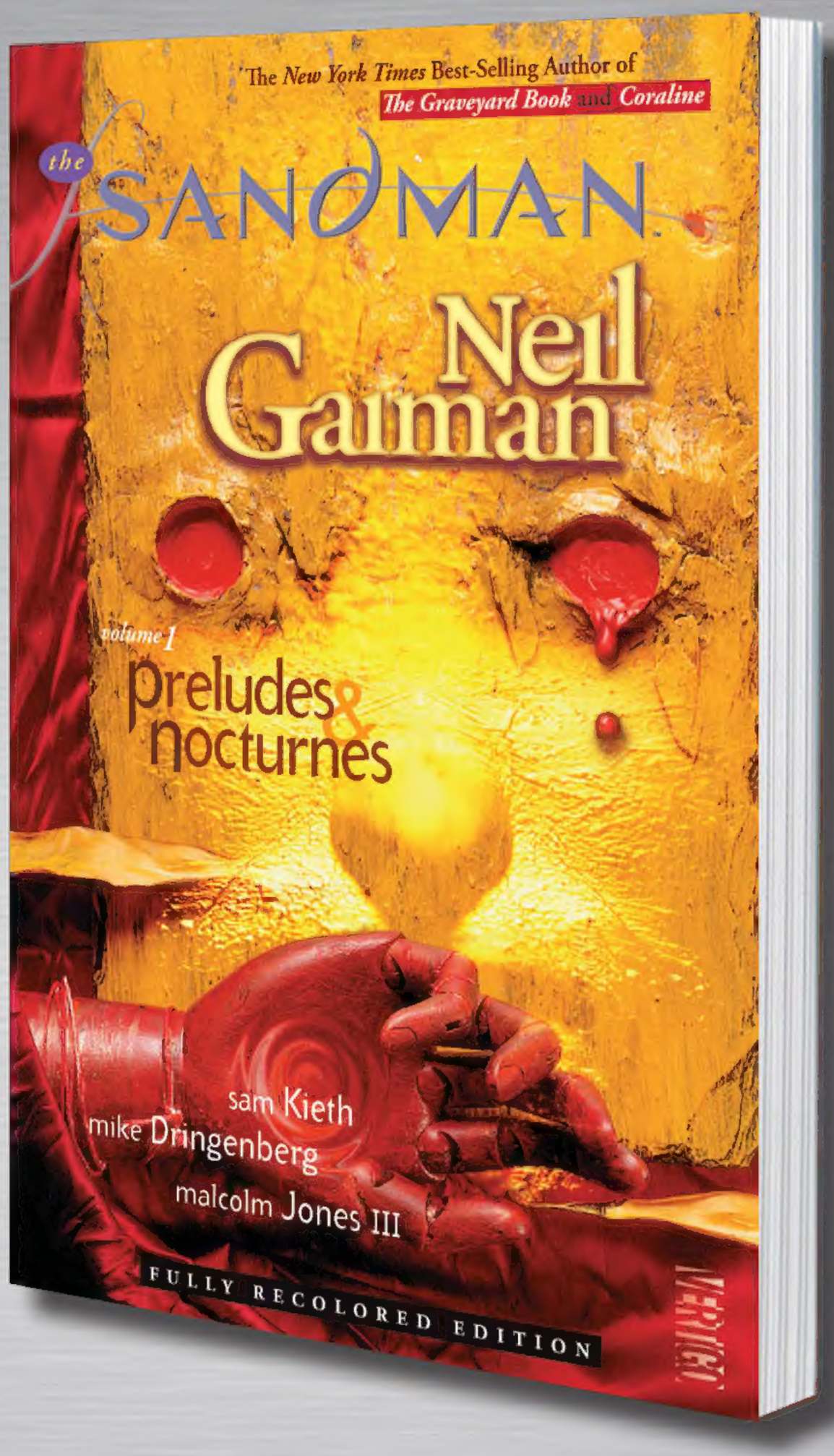


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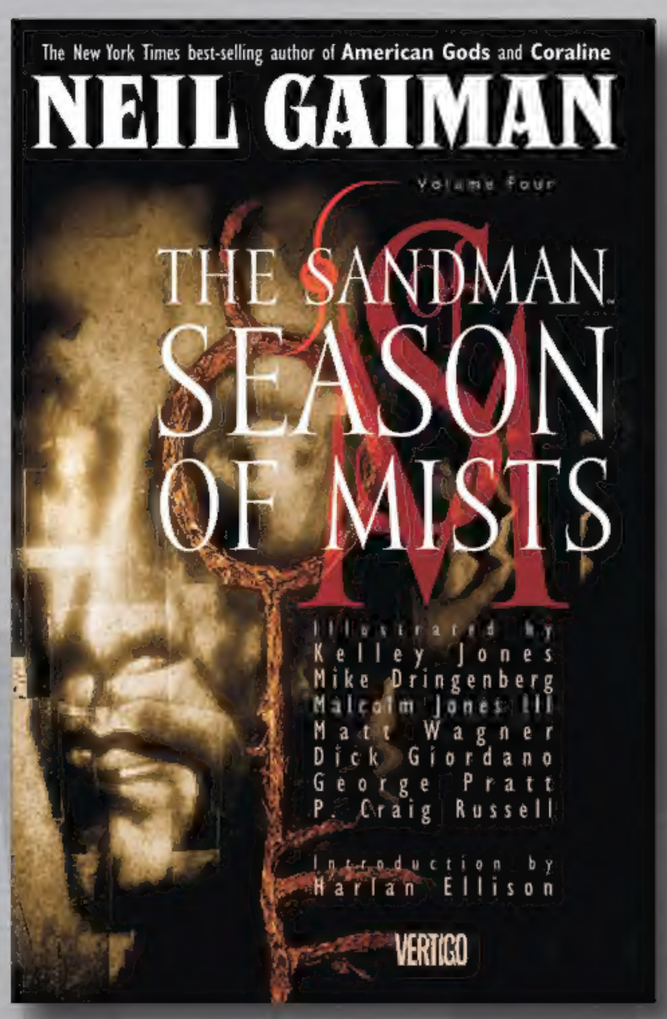


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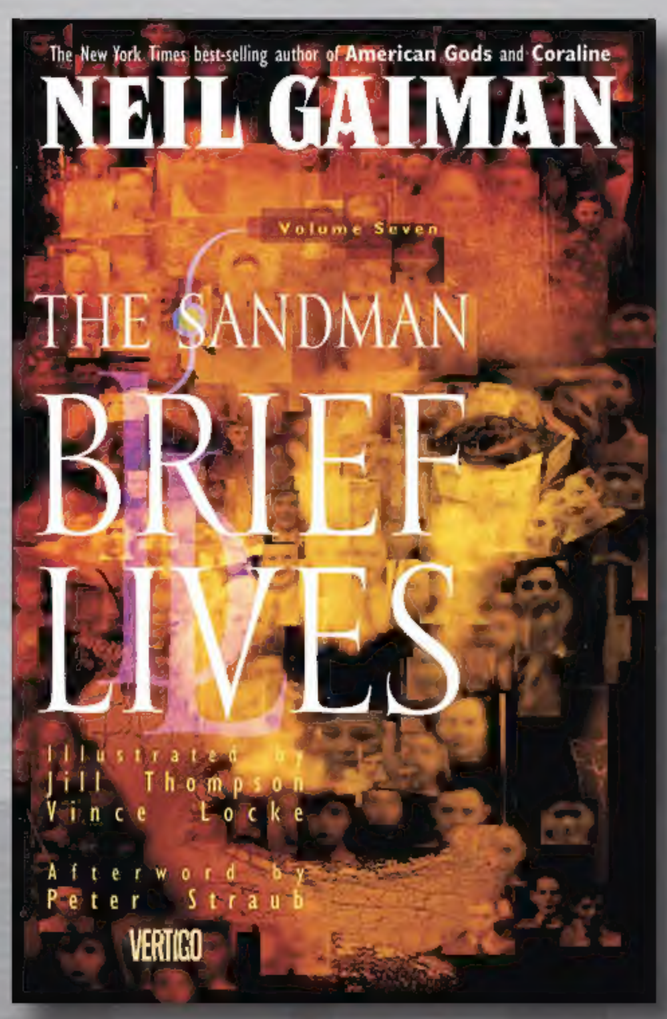


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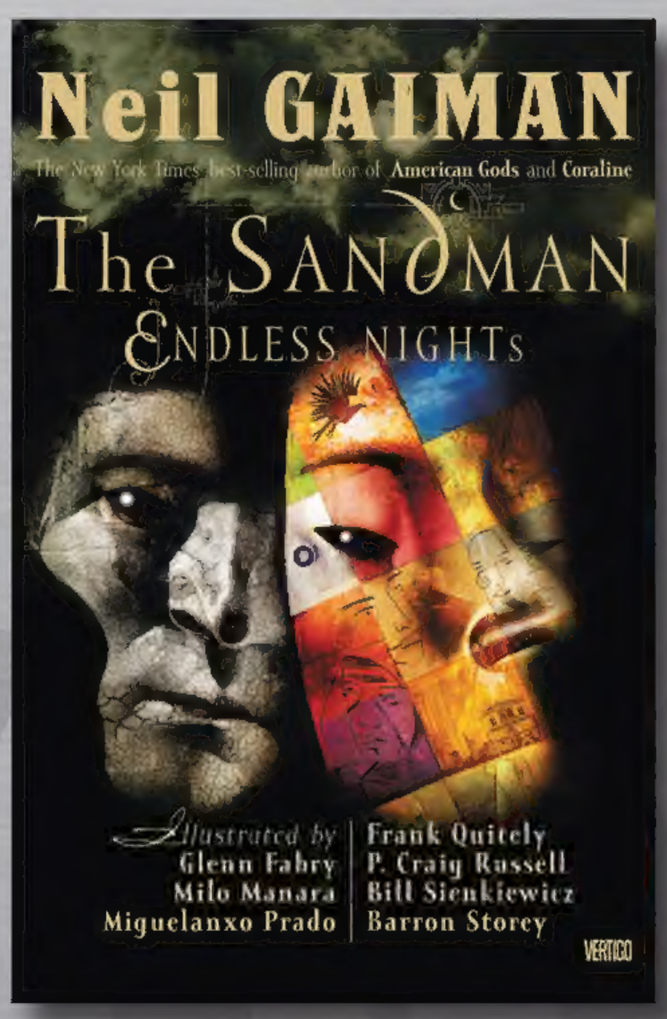


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